

Forbes

# French Architect Charles Zana's New Exhibition In Paris During Art Basel Is A Manifesto For Living Artfully

Set in a historic apartment in the heart of Paris, designer Charles Zana's latest exhibition mixing lacquer, pewter, ceramic and personal treasures reveals his most intimate and experimental vision yet.

By Y-Jean Mun-Delsalle, Contributor. ⓘ Y-Jean Mun-Delsalle is a Paris-based r... ▼

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Franck armchair by Charles Zana  
PHOTO GASPARD HERMACH. COURTESY OF CHARLES ZANA

**Charles Zana** designs the way others collect art—with instinct, precision and passion. Responsible for Hotel Lou Pinet in St. Tropez, Hotel Kimpton in Paris, the Goyard boutique in Monte Carlo, Fondation CAB in Saint-Paul-de-Vence and private residences in London, Geneva, Venice and New York, the French architect and designer, born in Tunisia and raised in Paris, has spent more than three decades crafting interiors where architecture, art and emotion exist in perfect harmony. His childhood home was already a lesson in taste: his parents were devoted collectors whose 1970's apartment was a treasure trove of architect-designed furniture and artworks, where Jean Royère, Pierre Paulin and Gae Aulenti coexisted with 18th-century antiques and Picasso ceramics. From his father—a self-taught aesthete with an insatiable curiosity—Zana inherited a love of discovery and eclecticism. It was in this world of contrasts and culture that his creative vision took shape—one rooted in the belief that art and design are inseparable from life itself.

After graduating from the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, Zana built a practice that fuses rigor with sensuality and modernism with memory. Every project begins with the architect's discipline—comfort, light, circulation and proportion—and expands into the realm of art, materiality and craftsmanship. His work reflects the influence of 20th-century Italian masters Gio Ponti, Ettore Sottsass, Andrea Branzi, Enzo Mari and Carlo Scarpa, whose spirit of experimentation continues to guide his vision. Driven by the sensibility of a collector, he configures each interior like a curated discussion between objects, materials and time periods. The result is a distinctive language of restraint and emotion, structure and soul, where every detail tells a story and every space becomes a conversation between past and present.



Peter coffee table by Charles Zana  
PHOTO JEAN-PIERRE VAILLANCOURT. COURTESY OF CHARLES ZANA

Equally at ease designing exteriors as interiors, Zana treats pieces of furniture as “small architectural elements”, integral to the spatial narrative. What began as bespoke furniture for private clients has evolved into collectible design sold through his Paris showroom. From October 22 to 26, he will unveil “In Situ”—a bold new exhibition staged in a 19th-century Parisian apartment at 242 Rue de Rivoli overlooking the Tuileries Garden. Meaning “in its natural place”, “In Situ” embodies his belief in interiors composed with intent—layered, balanced and deeply human.



Exhibition view of In Situ  
PHOTO GASPARD HERMACH



Transforming the space into a lived-in manifesto, Zana presents over 30 new and reimagined pieces of furniture. Among the highlights are Sara, a sinuous six-meter-long reinterpretation in pewter of his iconic Julie sofa; three lacquer tables created in collaboration with atelier [Pierre Bonnefille](#); two oval bronze mirrors aptly named Carlo in homage to Carlo Scarpa; the Big Franck in patinated bronze and rich fabric, a maximalist take on his Franck bridge chair; and the looping Attilio wall light in pewter, joined by a new series of sculptural plaster sconces. His introduction of a cabinet of curiosities drawn from his own art collection—which includes two plaster monoliths by Andrea Branzi, 50 Polaroids by Carlo Mollino, ceramics by Ettore Sottsass, paintings by Eugène Carrière and antiques—adds an intimate, personal dimension.

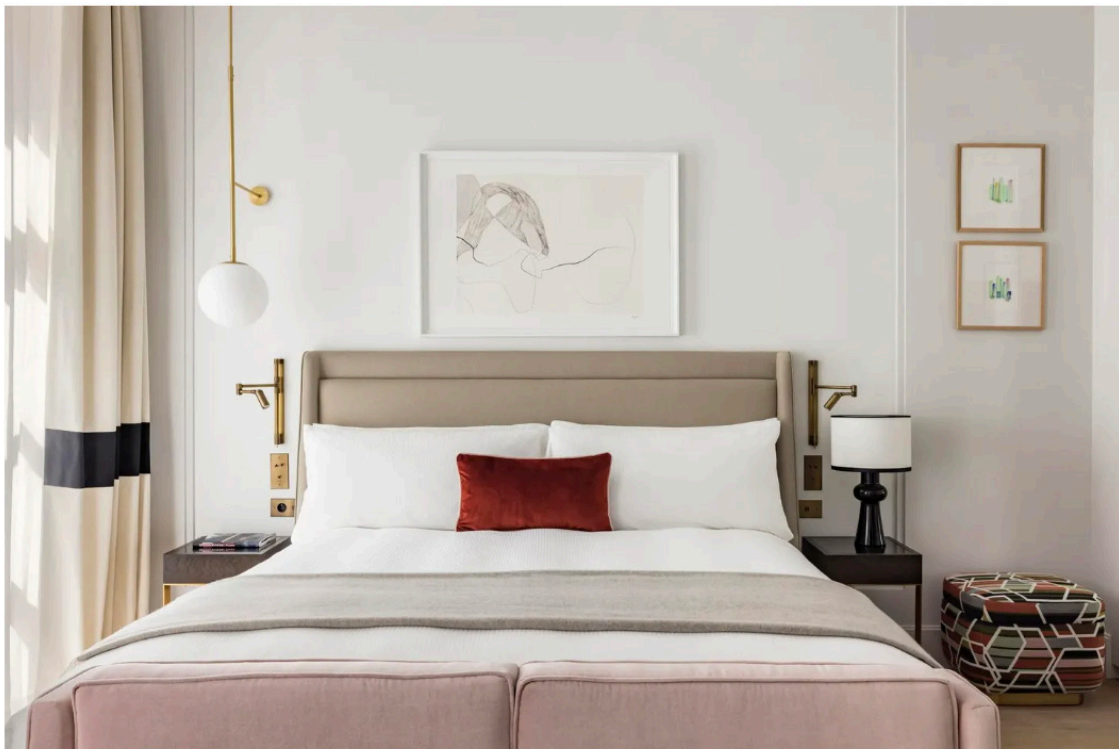


Fondation CAB in Saint-Paul-de-Vence  
PHOTO ANTOINE LIPPENS

As he prepares to complete the Fondation Bustamante in Arles and a collector's residence in Hong Kong in 2026, Zana continues to prove that architecture, art and craftsmanship are not separate disciplines but one continuous expression of culture, beauty and life. He sits down to discuss his lifelong dialog between architecture and art, the influence of his collector parents, his reverence for Italian masters and the inspiration behind "In Situ".

**You were born in Sousse, Tunisia, in 1960 and moved to Paris when you were two. How did your upbringing and your parents' passion for collecting shape your esthetic sensibility?**

My parents returned to France when Tunisia gained independence. My father worked in publishing, and my mother ran a gynecology clinic. My father was interested in art from a very young age—it was a way of life for him. He taught himself through books and exhibitions and had this constant desire to discover new things. Their home in the 1970s was a typical collectors' home, with a lot of architect-designed furniture. My father collected Picasso ceramics, illustrated art books, magnifying glasses, jewelry for my mother and furniture by Gae Aulenti, Jean Royère and Pierre Paulin. He liked to combine the radical modernity of these designers with the elegance of 18th-century pieces. From him, I inherited a taste for eclecticism: not being a man of one style, but pursuing several passions at once. His eye was instinctive, pure, entirely self-taught, and his insatiable curiosity—never satisfied with exhibitions or discoveries—has profoundly influenced my approach to art and design.



Deluxe guestroom at Kimpton St. Honoré Paris  
PHOTO JEROME GALLAND

**You often reference Italian 20th-century masters like Gio Ponti, Ettore Sottsass, Andrea Branzi and Carlo Scarpa. What is it about their work that resonates with you, and how do their legacies manifest in your own projects?**

I have always admired Italian architects of the 20th century. Gio Ponti inspires me with his elegance and holistic vision of a project—able to move seamlessly from object to building with rare coherence. Carlo Scarpa is a master of materials and detail, an architect-poet who reminds me of the importance of the right gesture and the depth of subtle combinations. Ettore Sottsass, whom I admire as a complete artist, taught me to dare with color, humor and exuberance, and not to be afraid of breaking codes. He blurred the lines between art and design. Andrea Branzi was the first to bring nature into design, sparking a debate that remains incredibly relevant today. These figures are beacons in my work. They encourage me to seek a balance between rigor and freedom, memory and invention—always with a profoundly humanist spirit.

**What do you like about designing both the architecture and furniture for a project?**

All our furniture is born out of reflection on the projects themselves. It is first and foremost a response to a client's request or to the singularity of a place. For example, the Alexandra sofa was designed for a huge kitchen because the clients dreamed of having a sofa in this unusual space. Each piece is therefore the result of a dialog, both functional and poetic, which extends the architecture into the furniture. I really like this idea of a collection in motion.



Alexandra sofa Sofa handcrafted in France with a unique French savoir-faire  
PHOTO COURTESY OF CHARLES ZANA



## **Craftsmanship plays an essential role in your work. Tell me about the artisans with which you collaborate.**

France is uniquely fortunate to have artisans capable of constantly pushing the boundaries, with extraordinary rigor. This is our heritage! Our furniture often arises from a dialog between several workshops, each contributing its own unique expertise. This is precisely what moves me in the tradition of French decorative arts: the idea that a piece of furniture is the fruit of collective work, of intersecting different perspectives and expert hands. This spirit is reflected in the great tradition of French Art Deco furniture. I collaborate in particular with [Charles Jouffre](#) in Lyon on our sofas. I deeply admire his mastery, but also the classic culture of upholstery he embodies and constantly reinvents with each project. And often, ideas arise as I wander through these workshops. A visit to [Maison Charlois](#) in the Nièvre left a deep impression on me: discovering their work with solid oak—having produced barrels for generations—inspired me to design with them a collection of raw wooden stools, shaped by the primary shapes and forms from the vocabulary of lumberjacks. The design was inspired by the size of the logs themselves. Their passion for this project gave birth to a collaboration that has now resulted in three pieces that we are presenting in “In Situ”.

## **Speaking of “In Situ”, your exhibition during [Art Basel Paris](#) presents over 30 new and reimagined works. What can visitors expect?**

With “In Situ”, I am exploring new territory. The big innovation is lacquer, which we’ve worked like an exceptional material in completely new colors. There will also be pieces with spectacular dimensions. Among the flagship creations is the Sara sofa, deliberately oversized, inspired by an oriental idea of comfort. It can be sat on from both sides, in the center of a room, and offers a new attitude to space. This piece is a small piece of architecture that structures the space like the sofa or artworks of the 1970s. Another striking piece is a large bronze chandelier, composed of intertwined free forms, designed as a true illuminating sculpture. All of our favorite materials are also present: plaster, of course, with a set of wall lights, but also cast glass, brushed wood and travertine, all worked with the same care. It is also a more personal exhibition, where I am showing works from my collection for the first time: 19th-century art and antiques, but also Carlo Mollino’s Polaroids. “In Situ” embodies this blend of creation and collection, classic and modern, intimate and universal.





In Situ exhibition at 242 Rue de Rivoli in Paris  
PHOTO VINCENT LEROUX. COURTESY OF CHARLES ZANA

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**By Y-Jean Mun-Delsalle** . Y-Jean Mun-Delsalle is a reporter focusing on art, design, architecture, horology and jewelry, and has been writing for Forbes since 2014. She has interviewed [Ai Weiwei](#), [Bernar Venet](#), Jeff Koons,...

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